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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MANDEANS FACE INTERNAL SPLIT EVEN AS THEY SEEK
NATIONAL REPRESENTATION

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1860
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2473

Classified By: Political Counselor Yuri Kim for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Sabeen-Mandean leaders tell us they are making a united full-court press to secure guaranteed representation in the next Iraqi Parliament, even as current leader Sheikh Sittar Hillo fends off a challenge from a younger rival. While the Mandeans acknowledge that the GOI has taken positive steps recently to protect their community, the community continues to be the target of violent attacks by criminal gangs. END SUMMARY.

MAKING THEIR CASE FOR A SEAT

[1](#)2. (C) On September 13-14, Poloff met with three leaders from the Sabeen-Mandean community -- Baghdad Provincial Council Member Ali Zahroon, Mandean Endowments Director Tomah Zahroon, and Director of Public Relations for the Mandean Council Khaled Amin Romi -- to discuss their efforts to secure representation in the January 2010 national parliamentary elections. They stated that over the past several weeks the Mandeans had met with Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi, Parliament Speaker Ayad Hammuraie, Deputy Speaker Khaled al-Attia, and influential MP Hamam al-Hamudi in an effort to press their case for a reserved Mandean seat to be included in the national elections law. According to the Mandeans, these leaders were supportive of their cause, but non-committal in terms of predicting what provisions the final elections law would include. The Mandean leaders stated that they plan to meet with PM Maliki and President Talabani in the near future. Asked if they would consider running with a larger political party, Tomah Zahroon argued that such a move would signal that the Mandeans were taking sides in Iraq's larger political conflict.

A MANDEAN COUP D'ETAT?

[1](#)3. (C) Even as they press their case for national representation, the Mandean community has recently been forced to deal with an internal leadership struggle. The onus for the split appears to be the decision of Mandean leader, Sheikh Sittar Hillo, to acquire an Australian residency permit in order to spend time with his family who are now living there (ref A). According to Ali Zahroon, the receipt of the residency permit was damaging to Sheikh Hillo's public image, although he apparently received permission from the Mandean Council before proceeding. Sensing an opportunity to take over the mantle of leadership a younger rival from Basra, Sheikh Ra'ad Gubashi has claimed that Hillo's decision to live in Australia has disqualified him from leading the Mandean community in Iraq. While the Mandeans concede that the Australia decision has weakened Hillo, they do not believe Gubashi has enough support to oust

him because he is too young and does not yet have the religious credentials.

CONTINUED VIOLENCE AGAINST MANDEANS

¶4. (C) The Mandaean leaders also lamented the fact that their community continues to be the victim of violent crime. They stated that on September 2, criminals entered the home of Abdul Wahid Kadhami during the day and killed him with silenced pistols, while injuring his wife in the process. In a separate incident two weeks prior, they said criminals attempted to break into a Mandaean jewelry store on Palestine Street, but were foiled when the store owner shot and wounded one of the burglars. The Mandaeans stated that the police caught the assailants. Asked why the Mandaeans continue to be targeted, Romi stated that the primary motivation is an economic one given that many Mandaeans are wealthy and jewelry stores make inviting targets. At the same time, he argued that there are sectarian overtones to these attacks and asserted that three times as many Mandaean jewelers have been attacked as have Muslim jewelers. He believed this was the reason behind continued emigration of Mandaeans from Iraq.

A MODICUM OF JUSTICE

¶5. (C) In their meetings with high-level GOI officials, the Mandaeans have continued to request greater efforts to arrest and punish those responsible for crimes committed against

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their community. One recent positive development was the arrest of six individuals in connection with a coordinated daytime robbery on April 19 that left seven jewelers in Baghdad dead including three Sabeen-Mandaeans. According to Tomah Zahroon, the six individuals had been tried and sentenced to death. At the same time, he expressed disappointment that there had been no other arrests in recent attacks on Mandaeans although he did concede that the issue may be a lack of capacity rather than will. According to Zahroon, Vice President Hashimi told the Mandaeans that his brother had also been killed and that no one had been arrested despite his high position.

DEFENDING THEMSELVES

¶6. (C) The Mandaean leaders also expressed satisfaction with the GOI's recent decision to hire minorities to guard their own places of worship (ref B). Tomah Zahroon said that all 60 Mandaeans who would be hired would be deployed to guard the Mandaean temple in Baghdad as well as the adjacent Mandaean cultural center. He expressed satisfaction that half of the new guards would be women, but believed that poverty was a factor in their recruitment. Less optimistic, Ali Zahroon argued that 60 guards would not solve the Mandaeans' problems and that there would never be a sufficient number of guards to make the Mandaeans safe until stability was returned to Iraq.
HILL